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WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

What is Happiness?

by

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WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

I

J. B. PRIESTLEY

No one praises happiness as one
praises justice, but we call it 'a
blessing,' deeming it something
higher and more divine than things
we praise.

ARISTOTLE

HAPPINESS is difficult to define for many good reasons. One of them is that it is a term used very loosely. Another is that happiness being private every man has his own idea of it. His own standard, too.

For example, most of us would declare that Robert Louis Stevenson, for all his ill-health and struggles, must have been a happy man. Yet in a famous letter Stevenson himself wrote that he had been happy only once, at Hyères. We must assume, then, that either we are mistaken about Stevenson's nature or that his private standard of happiness differed from ours.

We may say that happiness is a vaguely defined territory of the spirit, lying somewhere between contentment on the one side and ecstasy on the other. These

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boundaries may help us to place happiness on our map.



Now I would say that the secret of contentment is fulfilment. The contented being is the being that is able to realize its own nature and does not feel anywhere frustrated. At a time when people feel new needs in themselves, a hint of new powers, but find themselves still confined within the old limits, there will be universal discontent. As, I consider, there is to-day.

Ecstasy I believe to be a sudden sense of enlargement and expansion. Some people never experience it at all, simply because they are not capable of this sudden enlargement and expansion. Nobody has much of it, obviously, because a personality cannot be always suddenly enlarging itself and expanding.

There is something mysterious about ecstasy because there is something mysterious about the human spirit. We do not

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know very much about its resources and limits. When we are overwhelmed by natural beauty, by some great work of art, by some powerful creative idea, by love, we do not really know what is happening to us, where part of us has gone to, what we are in touch with, and in my opinion all the psychologists in the world together cannot tell us.

Life is mysterious, and ecstasy, following this strange enlargement and expansion of our essential beings, is not only part of this mystery, but also perhaps a profound clue to its secret.

Our happiness, then, lies somewhere between fulfilment (not in any large spiritual sense) and this expansion. It is more than contentment and less than ecstasy. We cannot be much more accurate because now the private standard enters into the question.

Some persons have an easy standard, and so have only to pass the borders of contentment to say they have achieved happiness. Other persons have to come within sight of ecstasy before they will admit to being

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happy. We have no right to dictate a standard to either party.

There are some people who plan their lives elaborately in order to achieve happiness. They have it all worked out, usually quite intelligently and tastefully: a little of this, then not too much of that, with a dash or two of the other; and all will be well.

The ancient Chinese, I understand, were like this; so were certain of the Greeks of the classic age; and the French too have this careful, rational, Epicurean outlook. Among our own contemporary authors, I imagine that Mr. Somerset Maugham would subscribe to this way of life.

That it has worked well with some people, that it has also produced much that is beautiful or wise, there can be no denying. But I will confess that I myself do not understand it.

There is, it seems to me, one fatal draw-

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back. It increases self-consciousness, and so would seem to me to be turning its back on happiness. To carry out an elaborate programme in order to be happy appears to me to be saying good-bye to real happiness.

There you are, very aware of yourself, in the middle of the fine scheme, desperately wondering if you are happy. Whereas to me there is in happiness an element of self-forgetfulness. You lose yourself in something outside yourself when you are happy; just as when you are desperately miserable you are intensely conscious of yourself, are a solid little lump of ego weighing a ton.

I have been careful in the last paragraph to indicate that it is my own opinion I am putting forward, because there can be no doubt that this elaborate planning of happiness, this self-conscious tasting of existence, does work well for some natures.

It may be that here we have a fundamental

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difference of natures, and that it is possible for persons who have what we might call the Latin nature to be happy in a fashion impossible to persons more romantic in character. And clearly in this matter a man must speak for himself.

In some well-known lines Wordsworth once suggested that it was a deep flaw in a man's character because to him a yellow primrose was just a yellow primrose 'and nothing more.'

Since then Wordsworth himself has been severely criticized because he could not be content with a yellow primrose just being a yellow primrose. (It is significant, however, that this criticism did not come from persons who knew any more about wild flowers than Wordsworth did.)

In this matter I am by temperament a Wordsworthian. I am made happy by the primrose because at that moment it is a

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primrose *and* something more, a clue, a sign, a symbol. That is the kind of mind I have, and to be happy I must live richly in that mind.

This article is being written in the United States, where I have spent a good deal of time these last few years. Now the Americans, in spite of a temporary trade depression, should be leading happy lives, for they live in comparative security, with immense resources, a very high standard of material comfort and convenience, and with much to keep them entertained.

But I should not call them, at large, a happy people, and I suspect that many of them are not happy because they have lost the capacity for living richly in their minds. They suffer, these unhappy ones, from an interior emptiness, a mental and spiritual sterility.

If they were the gross materialists they are sometimes wrongly held to be, they would not suffer in this manner; but at heart many of them are romantic idealists who have

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somehow lost the way into the rich symbolic world of romantic idealism. Thus they are like a born pianist who has been deprived of the use of his fingers.

Some people—of whom I suspect Mr. Aldous Huxley to be one—can only be happy by doing without things. The pleasures of the senses seem to them to be the enemies of our real nature. Instead of tasting, like the Epicureans, they are for not touching at all, withdrawing, disdaining.

Here, again, I feel there is too much self-consciousness in the business for genuine happiness. When I do without, I am immensely conscious of myself doing without, and find myself bathed in a not very admirable glow of priggish virtue. That way, for me, neither salvation nor happiness lies. And here again it is probably a question of temperament or even fundamental nature.

I am not satisfied by a life in which a

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primrose is a primrose and nothing more. On the other hand, I do not want a life in which you ignore a real primrose but meditate for hours on an imaginary one.

What satisfies me and makes for my happiness is a life filled with real primroses that are also more than primrose clues, signs, symbols. I like to enjoy material pleasures, but not as ends in themselves. Thus, both the gourmand and the ascetic seem to me equally wrong, to have both missed the point. And here, I think, women are much more sensible than men.

Most of them seem to perceive instinctively the right relation between the material and the spiritual, to understand that a thing can be enjoyed both for itself and as yet another significant thread in the whole web of things.

The present is not a happy age. The Epicurean cannot find the peace and quiet

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necessary for his elaborate tasting of experience.

The ascetic finds himself surrounded by every form of self-indulgence. And the people who think and feel as I do—and I think this includes most of the Northern races—are apt to be confused and unhappy because they have been told so often that the primrose could not possibly mean anything more, though the very persons who assert this do not really know what a primrose is.

The very craze for speed is significant. People are dimly hoping that if they only go fast enough, they will find something significant somewhere. And so they may, but it will not be happiness.

2

**MARTIN
ARMSTRONG**

Tranquillity is better than jollity.

SIR THOMAS BROWNE

ALL men without exception,' wrote Pascal, 'seek to be happy. Whatever different means they employ, all make for this end. . . . It is the motive of every action of every man, even the man who goes out to hang himself.'

A startling remark, and a remark, like so many of Pascal's, which sets you off on a train of thought.

At first it seems grimly comical, but we soon see that it is tragically true, for the poor devil who hangs himself is only an extreme case of those of us—the majority—who seek happiness in escape. His behaviour is frequently described as 'suicide while of unsound mind,' but actually it is no more insane than that of swarms of apparently sane men and women who set their hopes of happiness in escape from themselves.

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Like people engaged in a treasure-hunt, they pursue happiness for all the world as if it were some sort of commodity, done up in a brown-paper parcel, waiting to be found by anyone who has the wits to find it. Unhappily, they are on a false scent. The parcel they are after contains not happiness but that cheap marketable and agreeable commodity, *pleasure*, which is a very different thing.

For happiness and unhappiness are conditions of the mind. We don't receive them from outside; we project them out of ourselves on to external things. And so the expression 'the pursuit of happiness' is, strictly speaking, nonsensical, and the man who pursues happiness, or imagines he is doing so, is like a man who hunts the house for the spectacles which are in his pocket. Coleridge has stated the fact in a couple of lines:

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*I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains
are within.*

Consider for a moment the unhappy man, the born worrier. He is never at a loss for something to worry about. Anything will do. If there is nothing ready to hand, if his dividends have gone up and his bills down, if his children all win scholarships and all his vegetables get first prizes at the local flower show, there remains always the rise or decline in the birth-rate of Tierra del Fuego.

Many of such folk get quite a reputation for the breadth of their sympathies, but it is noticeable that they never try to remedy the evils they deplore. Naturally not, since, if they succeeded, they would have deprived themselves of an excuse for worry.

So, too, the happy man—that excessively rare creature—focuses his happiness on the

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most insignificant object or occasion—a primrose by the river's brim, a London fog, or a good-morning from a passing stranger. But objects and occasions are not necessary to him. His happiness exists within him. That is why he has less need than others of the distraction of pleasures.

It is the unhappy man who needs pleasures: they enable him to forget his unhappiness for a while. They do nothing to cure the condition, but like morphia, they numb the pain caused by the condition.

If everybody in the world were completely happy, such things as cinemas, theatres, fox-hunts, golf courses, and even that admirable institution the pub., would notice an alarming drop in their finances. 'Men occupy their time,' said Pascal, 'in running after a ball or a hare.'

Of course they do, for by so doing they run away from themselves. Some personage—was it Gladstone?—when asked if he played golf, replied that when he went for a walk he preferred not to have the trouble

of hitting a ball in front of him. It sounds like the reply of a happy man.

All this, of course, is only one side of the matter. The pleasure we take in the arts and in games of skill is not entirely an escape from ourselves. It may very well be a happy exploitation of body and mind. But the other aspect is real enough: pleasures are used much more as escapes than as fulfilments.

It is only the happy man who is self-reliant enough to be able to do nothing and yet be happy. Once again Pascal touches the spot. 'All man's unhappiness,' he says, 'comes from one single thing, which is that he does not know how to sit at peace in a room.'

How many of us can bear the mere idea of sitting alone in a room for, say, a quarter of an hour doing absolutely nothing? Only the happy man will enjoy that quarter of an hour. And yet, if the unhappy man will try

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it, taking care really to do nothing at all, above all not to think, he will find it an astonishing restorative to the mind. It is not only a rest, but a powerful tonic.

He will be surprised, when he gets active again, to find how rosy or how insignificant the problem of the birth-rate of Tierra del Fuego has become while his back was turned. He may even decide either to do something about it or to banish it from his mind and leave the matter to the natives.

But how are we to define happiness? The best definition I can suggest is that it is the condition of the healthy mind. How, then, are we to achieve it? The best way, of course, is to choose your parents carefully and persuade them, at the outset, to endow you with a healthy body and a healthy mind; but this is more easily said than done.

Indeed, all ways of achieving happiness, if we don't possess it by a happy accident, are

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difficult, just as it is difficult to become a great writer, a great composer, a great saint, or, for that matter, a great sinner. One of the difficulties lies in the close interdependence of mind and body.

It is difficult, though far from impossible, to have a healthy mind if you have an unhealthy body, and it is even more difficult to have a healthy body if you have an unhealthy mind, since mind has a greater influence over body than body has over mind—a fact that is all to the good in the business of achieving happiness.

But the question still remains how *can* we achieve it? A necessary step is to learn to control our minds (and I take mind to include the emotions and desires and that old devil *the unconscious*) at least as efficiently as we control our bodies.

The bodies of most of us are, to some degree at least, our obedient slaves; but most of us are the obedient slaves of our minds. Before we can be truly happy we must gain control of our minds. How am I to do so?

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The answer is simple: by obeying the Greek maxim, ‘Know thyself.’ Good! We are almost, it seems, at the end of our inquiry. Only one question remains: how am I to get to know myself? Ah! Now you’re asking. Saints and philosophers have been engaged on this simple question for some thousands of years but, unhappily, the answer is not yet to hand.

3

STORM JAMESON

**A happy man or woman is a better
thing to find than a five-pound note.**

R. L. STEVENSON

TH E human race began its thinking in fairy tales. In them the oldest fears, hopes, visions of common men took human and animal shapes and spoke. We have not outgrown any of them. We think we have, but their roots in us are too old and fast.

With a few frightening exceptions, the fairy tales have only one theme—the pursuit of happiness. The three brothers, the only son, go off in search of a kingdom which may be given different names, but is always the same kingdom. The children of the starving peasant find gold in the witch's forest. The dispossessed, the foolish Youngest Brother, the beaten step-child, endure as many dangers as Ulysses, but escape, live happily in the end.

But there must always have been awful doubts, not silenced by the fairy tales. You

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looked round you and saw that in life the innocent do not always escape. Towns have been burned before Guernica, and their decent, kindly people murdered. The poor clever boy grows up into a poor defeated plodder much oftener than into a rich man or a shipping knight. Generals die in bed, and youth hangs itself.

The notion that happiness may be unattainable is too much to swallow. There must be happiness somewhere. If not in this life and this world, then in another. Long before the Christian revelation, men invented heavens to satisfy their craving for happiness. Or they gave up looking for it in the disappointing outer world and looked for it in themselves.

This last was a stroke of genius, of the greatest genius the world has known. What makes you unhappy? Unsatisfied desires. You want this or that, a great or a small

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pleasure, and you have missed it. So, then, if you give up your desires, if you desire nothing, you will cease to be unhappy.

Better still, you will become happy in a new way, in a way which nothing can shake. Nothing can touch the man who has no desires. He is free. He feels no envy when he sees other men making money. He wants nothing that it can buy. He has no ambitions. He never holds anything so tightly that it can cost him a pang to give it up. Happy, happy man.

It's all true. The more you can give up the happier you are. An immense tranquillity takes possession of the heart you have emptied of every wish. If you think it easy, try it. Try to act on the principle of, 'I am nothing, and I need nothing.' Try to avoid being in such a hurry to get somewhere that you tread on weaker people. When you reach the stage of wanting nothing enough to tell lies, to cheat, or to fight in order to get it, you will be—happy. Well, try it.

Most of us prefer to seek happiness in

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other ways. We spend our lives running after it. We pursue it blunderingly, cruelly, pitifully. Even a dictator is seeking happiness. ‘He won’t be happy till he gets it.’ If his happiness, his self-satisfaction, involves the deaths of millions of people who have never even seen him, that’s too bad.

It is too bad for the victims. The dictator who wanted simply to dictate, although he wrapped his desire up in fine patriotic phrases, is happy as long as he is able to go on doing it.

It is not true, as the sentimentalists tell us, that youth is the time of greatest happiness. It is only the very young who know what it is to be excruciatingly and uncompromisingly unhappy. It is all very exaggerated, but it is sincere.

At the same time, only the young can enjoy an ecstasy of happiness simply in moving about; in dancing or running.

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Without thinking at all one can be happy for a whole evening—for a whole day—when one is young enough. And anyone who says that this is not happiness, or not ‘real’ happiness, is a liar or a fool.

The chief figure of our times, the Little Man, spends anxious moments wondering why he is not happier. Everything possible is done for him and his wife; he has his golf and his little car at week-ends, instead of the old quiet sermon-and-roast-beef Sunday; he can see Garbo for a shilling; his wife has a vacuum cleaner, copies of Paris models, three hundred varieties of face cream; there are the wireless, the sixpennies, the hire purchase agreement. They need never have a dull or an unoccupied moment. Then why is their life not one continuous smile? Why not, indeed!

I dare say I have lived more than half my life. But I have only just realized that there

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are two distinct kinds of happiness. The first can, within limits, be arranged for. It comes from the satisfaction of a few very simple desires.

If, for instance, I can be set down at a café table in any small shabby street full of sunshine and people, I am happy. I am happy if I find myself alone in my house, with a book I want to read and time to read it and drink a cup of tea I make for myself. The sight of a certain moor road, seen across the valley from a certain angle, never fails to give me an authentic thrill of joy.

The other kind is less simple, and since it comes and goes without asking, less easy. Those brief moments of ecstasy—which can never be prepared for or expected, since you don't know where they come from.

That feeling which can drop as quickly from a grey sky as from any other—a feeling of confidence, of complete self-possession, of expectancy. Expectation of what? Goodness only knows. So long as it lasts—which is not long—it is the finest feeling in the world. It

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is not being happy about anything in particular; it is happiness itself.

In some versions of the story of the Youngest Brother he appears as an idle good-for-nothing. Nevertheless, he succeeds, and his industrious elder brothers fail. It is certainly extremely odd how happy one of the least deserving men I know manages to be.

He never makes any money, he misses chances, he is not virtuous or obliging or unselfish—yet he is very happy. Trying to make up my mind how he does it, I have come to the conclusion that it is because he has never pretended to be other than he is—an amiable, lazy, selfish man.

Perhaps there is only one way of deserving happiness, and that is to be what one most wishes to be. To resist all the well-meant attempts of our friends to improve us, or to drive us into improving ourselves. This

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sounds easy, but it is actually one of the hardest things in the world.

Look at me! I like people to approve of me, and to think of me as reliable and steady and sympathetic. With the result that I, who am naturally one of the laziest people in the world, have been driven into a life of hideous and unremitting industry when I might have idled my life away happily, making just enough money to keep me in bread and coffee, my favourite diet.

It takes enormous courage to become oneself, and not what other people, beginning with our parents, expect us to be. And then the reward of courage is not always what ordinary people mean by happiness. Think of Florence Nightingale. Heaven knows what agonies she went through to become the woman she wanted to be. And at no time did she give the impression of being a happy woman. Yet I believe she was.

In the end I have come to understand that happiness is not something we have a right to expect. It is not even something we

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deserve, unless we deserve it by doing nothing. Happiness comes from bread when you are hungry; it comes from a warm fire on frosty nights, from sleep when you have been tired to death. It comes from a chance word, it does not come when most eagerly expected.

4

V. S. PRITCHETT

**The happiness of man consists in
life, and life is in labour.**

TOLSTOY

I SEE no simple answer to this question. In my dictionary happiness is defined as a state characterized by a consciousness of well-being. But that does not get us very far.

Hazlitt, after failing at painting, marrying badly, divorcing, being tortured by a commonplace minx who was his landlady's daughter, quarrelling with his best friends, until they dropped him, being overworked, gnawed by debt, melancholy and chronic indigestion, astonished everyone by saying on his death-bed, 'I have had a happy life.'

In a Portuguese prison I spoke to a man who was serving a life sentence for murdering his wife, and as he stood in his cell, making an excellent copy of a photograph, he said that he had been saved by the monastic calm of prison life which had enabled him to discover this hitherto hidden

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artistic talent. Removed from the world, he was happy at last!

One man's meat is another's poison. There is the happiness of saints and the happiness of sinners; there is also the happiness of those who are neither.

An enormous amount of the talk that goes on between people is about unhappiness—indeed, it is rare to overhear a conversation in which people are describing the happy state. From this one could deduce either that everyone is unhappy or, more truly, I think, that happiness is a thing which does not lend itself to description and has little news value between people.

On the face of it, happiness seems to be a thing without history; and novelists, on the whole, while often telling how people strive for happiness, rarely describe happiness, when it is achieved, with any success.

Hardy would occasionally mention with an

V. S. PRITCHETT

air of impatience, that of course his doomed characters had their happy moments, and would quickly push on with the more interesting doom. This was natural. There is a feeling that happiness is static and dull; and when Flaubert remarked, in his old age, after a visit to a commonplace bourgeois family who, no doubt, uttered enough stupidities in one afternoon to make a chapter for his dictionary of *sottise*, ‘These are the happy people,’ it was a left-handed compliment.

No one had more precisely exposed the lives of such people. But the real reason why novelists neglect happiness is that, important as it is, it is obviously not always the ruling force or desire in people’s lives. Men and women want what they want—and happiness thrown in with it automatically!

In the young the desire to be free, after the restrictions of home life, is stronger than the desire for happiness; in the older, the happiness and unhappiness of freedom pall; they seek some restricting and narrowing order in their lives. It would be absurd to

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say that one state was happier or better than the other.

Of writers it has been noted that they write best when their particular field of happiness is damaged or their desires are frustrated. Many men owe the impetus to greatness to early unhappiness. If Bolivar's young wife had not died, would he have bothered at all about the freedom of South America? Dostoevsky was transformed from a clever young aesthete into a man who could illuminate the storms of spiritual experience by his suffering in Siberia. And Mr. Frank Swinnerton, once wittily described how a novelist ceased to write once he had had his appendix taken out.

The argument seems to be that happiness deadens the mind or rather disperses the faculties; but this assumes that not only is happiness our ruling desire, but that there is an absolute happiness. I do not believe this.

V. S. PRITCHETT

The vision of an absolute happiness of eternal bliss and even the concoction of general recipes for happiness, are projections of the desires of people who find happiness and unhappiness inextricably mixed in their lives. The sense of complete happiness is fitful.

In the present state of society or the world, with the sight of poverty, injustice, the persecution of good men, the massacre of the happy innocent by happy brutes in the air, with the threat of war, the present imposition on us by our leaders of a war-time mentality, a man can hardly be profoundly happy. I cannot imagine any kind of happiness without peace and goodness, but the sort of peace we have drifted into at the moment degrades my happiness.

In fact, contemporary history shows how aggressive egotism on the one hand and the desire for justice on the other are rapidly displacing from any ruling place it may have had, the conception of personal happiness as the supreme value.

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We all wish to be happy. But in modern Germany one sees how much the quality and desirability of happiness depends upon our conception of what is necessary and good.

It has often been said that we talk so much nowadays about happiness because we are unhappy; and that we are unhappy because we have lost certain beliefs. But people find strength, meaning, and happiness in bad beliefs, as well as good ones, and the hysterical handing over of one's life to a Leader, now taking place in the German jungle, undoubtedly has given the German tribes a sort of happiness. It is an impoverishing happiness, for it is based on an impoverished sense of what is good; but it has in it that quality common to all kinds of happiness from the most shallow to the most profound: a sense of unity with something far greater than oneself—an idea, or people, nature or one of the innumerable conceptions of God.

Profound happiness is determined by the fullness of our life; and, for me, a full life is

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one in which we acknowledge and live in amity with the inner forces that rule us and in harmony with our environment.

But whatever little island of personal happiness we may have made for ourselves to-day, it is obvious that it is at the mercy of the present evils of society. Daily, through this inner sickness, bad conditions of society or the external threat of war, personal happiness becomes more precarious.

How isolated from realities all those writers of the older generation seem when they preached the supreme value of personal happiness. They were preaching a happiness only possible to the leisured, the secure and instructed. It was happiness *in vacuo*, happiness for a class. Competitive capitalism, which sets one man against another, which divides rather than unifies, makes us sick people; it makes the employer and rentier guilty and afraid and puts the clerks, typists, shop people, salesmen, the salary earner and the wage earner against each other.

Deprived of a full life with their fellows,

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they become isolated and aggressive because they are harassed and bewildered, and since eternal bliss in the next world is no longer a consolation, they will rush to any tribal leader. He will give them the temporary happiness of the drunkard, the longed-for escape.

I do not believe in Utopia, any more than I believe in absolute happiness. I have seen too many recipes for happiness lead to calamity. (I have also seen that calamity itself does not destroy the capacity for happiness.) But I think that, limited though it was to a class, the liberal view of happiness preached by our elders who grew up before 1914, was a good one.

I envy the disinterestedness and security from which their view of happiness came. But those of us who owe, as I do, a better and freer position in society than our grandparents had to the Education Act of the 'seventies, have paid dearly for that advantage.

V. S. PRITCHETT

We are precisely the people who can be tempted to rush in our social unhappiness, fear, and insecurity, to a Leader. ‘No gold, no Holy Ghost,’ said Samuel Butler. That is part of the reason. But the bigger reason is that we—and there are tens of thousands of us—have been uprooted by the new education from our families and a settled system.

We have been dug up by the roots, we have lost harmony with our environment, and therefore a major source of happiness and of judgment.

We have neither the solidarity of the poor nor the wisdom of those with a liberal tradition.

We have found our happiness, necessarily, in this very disadvantage, i.e. in freedom.

We have become the quintessential individualists.

The same process produced, for example, H. G. Wells, but as it goes on, conditions change. The romantic feeling of being an individualist is fine, but it wears thin; one

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becomes bored, sceptical and irresponsible. It is easiest for us, of all people, to find unity with an illusion than with men.

That is why, outside what personal happiness we have found, we are frustrated and unhappy in our relation to society and, being socially unhappy, are the dangerous people of our time.

5

BERTRAND RUSSELL

If it be my lot to crawl, I will crawl contentedly; if to fly, I will fly with alacrity; but as long as I can avoid it, I will never be unhappy.

SYDNEY SMITH

HAPPINESS depends upon a combination of internal and external causes. Writers on happiness, most of whom have been in comfortable circumstances, have unduly emphasized the internal causes.

What Marcus Aurelius would have thought if he had been put on a raft in the Arctic Ocean with nothing to eat or drink, would not have been quite what he said in his writings. Any man who maintains that happiness comes wholly from within should be compelled to spend thirty-six hours in rags in a blizzard, without food.

There have, no doubt, been men who could have remained happy in such circumstances, but they have been few and not far removed from lunacy. For the overwhelming majority of mankind certain elementary necessities and comforts are an

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indispensable condition of happiness. I do not much admire those rich men and women who tell the poor that happiness is spiritual and just as easy on a small income as on a large one.

Omitting saints, lunatics, and men of genius, ordinary people need, for their happiness, certain fairly simple conditions, which with a little wisdom in economics and politics, could be fulfilled for almost everyone. I put first the purely physical conditions—food and shelter and health. Only when these have been secured is it worth while to consider psychological requisites.

Having said this, however, I do not want to deny the importance of mental causes. We all know many people who have good health and enough to eat, who are nevertheless miserable. They may suffer through external circumstances: unpopularity, lack

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of success, unhappiness in marriage, or unsatisfactory children.

Or they may suffer through internal maladjustment, through conflicts in their own psychology. Not infrequently, external misfortunes have their source in the character of the sufferer; but conversely, the character of the sufferer may be warped by external misfortunes.

Happiness, if it is to have any depth and solidity, demands a life built round some central purpose of a kind demanding continuous activity and permitting of progressively increasing success. The purpose must be one which has its root in instinct, such as love of power or love of honour, or parental affection.

Some people, it is true, are like cats, and can be contented so long as they can lie in the sun; but this is exceptional, at least in northern countries. As the mental life develops, men become less and less able to find happiness in mere passive enjoyment.



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Nor is activity for its own sake satisfactory; what is needed is activity directed to a desired end. For the great majority of mankind there is too much of this: the time and energy spent in earning a living condemn the hours of leisure to fatigue and futility. But I doubt whether those who win sudden wealth in a sweepstake or a lottery are able, after the first, to enjoy their new leisure, unless they can become sufficiently interested in something to take again to work—though not such severe or uninteresting work as most people find necessary in order to avoid starvation.

Economic insecurity is, at present, one of the great sources of unhappiness. I am thinking not only of that extreme form which consists in fear of utter destitution, but of the dread of a descent in the social scale. This is not only painful in itself, but is a cause of terrible political consequences—Fascism, imperialism, and militarism are all reinforced by it.

It is entirely preventable: with a better

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economic system there need be no destitution and no social classes. But meanwhile the evil perpetuates itself by filling men's minds with envy and fear. So long as our economic system remains competitive, these emotions, with all their evil progeny, will continue to govern large parts of the lives of individuals and nations, making happiness precarious and embittered unhappiness very common.

The psychological sources of unhappiness, which are studied by psychiatrists in their extreme forms, mostly have their source in unwise treatment during childhood. A child may be unloved, or may feel that another child is unjustly favoured at his expense; the result is almost sure to be a proneness to discontent and envy and hostility.

Or he may be thwarted in his legitimate impulses of adventure and exploration, with

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the result that he becomes either timid or blindly rebellious.

This form of mistake is especially common with uneducated parents, who are perpetually saying 'don't' when there is no occasion for prohibition. It must be admitted that this attitude is not surprising in harassed and over-worked mothers, since a child's adventurousness is dangerous to himself and inconvenient to others.

This is one of the arguments in favour of nursery schools, where the environment can be free from dangers and fragile objects, and the child can learn muscular dexterity without fear of disaster.

There is an opposite danger, which is that of 'spoiling' by too much emotional affection and too little training in self-discipline. This produces an adult who is too much attached to a parent to be able to form new ties, or so accustomed to indulgence as to

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make impossible demands upon contemporaries.

These are only a few of the ways in which bad handling during the first years may produce a character incapable of happiness or success in later life.

The happiest body of men in the modern world are, I should say, the men of science. Their work is interesting, and difficult without being too difficult; they feel it to be important, and the world agrees with them; their sense of power is gratified, since science is transforming human life; and in spite of the new horrors that science has added to war, most of them are convinced that the effects of scientific knowledge are pretty sure to be beneficial in the long run.

They have the pleasure of exercising skill, the pleasure of winning public respect, the pleasure of seeing the practical benefits of their discoveries, and their work has a large impersonal interest which is a protection against self-absorption.

The conditions of a happy life, it seems to

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me, are: first, health and a fair degree of economic security; second, work which is satisfying both because it is felt to be worth doing and because it utilizes whatever skill a man possesses without making impossible demands; third, personal relations that are satisfying, and especially a happy family life; fourth, a width of interests which makes many things enjoyable.

Our age is not a happy one, because it is oppressed by vast organized hostilities, of nation against nation, class against class, and creed against creed. These evils have their root in political and economic evils, but they are perpetuated also, in part, owing to defects in individual psychology, which make mass appeals to hatred and fear more successful than appeals for sanity and co-operation.

If the majority of men were individually sane they would soon make an end of the

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collective insanities which threaten our civilization. But it is difficult to see how individual sanity is to be brought about in the countries whose Governments depend for their existence upon its absence.

Perhaps there is in human nature an impulse towards sanity which will reassert itself before long. It has been so in the past after epochs of temporary madness; we may therefore hope that it will be so again.

6

SIR HUGH WALPOLE

Happiness is nothing if it is not known, and very little if it is not envied.

SAMUEL JOHNSON

THIS is a dangerous question to ask, partly because there is no real answer to it, partly because any honest discussion of it may include a certain amount of priggishness and partly because to confess to happiness to-day implies a smug complacency and callousness to the general misfortunes of the world.

All the same I am going to try. Who are the happiest people I have known during my life? Undoubtedly the Saints.

Of these, naturally, I have met very few; during my childhood Dr. Westcott, Bishop of Durham, and then my mother and father, a soldier in the Russian Army and an old woman in Cornwall—there may have been one or two more.



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My father and mother are interesting examples to me of a happiness increasing through life because of increasing goodness and unselfishness. My father, when he was young, was narrow-minded and dogmatic.

As he grew older, simply through his own consciousness of his own faults and limitations, he became broad-minded and astonishingly understanding and unselfish. He never thought of himself at all, never spent a penny on himself, and loved all the world, although he never understood what sin really was.

My mother, on the other hand, was shy, sensitive and self-conscious; she could not believe that people liked her and she was nervously afraid of the world.

She, too, simply by recognition of her own weaknesses, developed her character all through life, until at the end when she was over seventy she enjoyed everything, books, theatres, travel, and was gay and humorous (she had an enchanting, rather cynical, humour)—and was tolerant, like my father, of all the world. These were saints, or at

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least became so through constant effort and self-discipline.

Who, on the other hand, is the unhappiest human being I know? A man who is constantly unhappy, although he doesn't know it, a man I care for deeply; he is an enormous success, but he gets no happiness from his success because when he hears applause he feels that it is only his rightful due, and when he meets criticism the faults always belong to others rather than to himself.

He is, in fact, a deep-fathoms sunk egoist; and the very first condition I would give for happiness is to have a sense of values wider than one's own life and personality. This means, I think, to have a spiritual life—not necessarily a religious one.

Any doctor, or scientist, or philanthropist who cares for some cause or creed more than for what happens to himself has a spiritual life. If you have this life you must have with

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it all the things that are worth while; love of liberty, honour, belief in your fellow human beings without too much credulity, patience, and a sense of humour and courage.

And now let's come down to earth a little. To be happy you must, I think, work, and it must be work that you like. I think this is one of the principal ways in which civilization has not yet found itself, namely, that so many human beings do not do work that they like.

How this is to be brought about, that everyone should love the work they do, I don't quite know, but that it will be brought about one day I am sure.

This creative impulse is the strongest thing in man and he always demands that it shall be satisfied. The whole history of his life is very often his search for that satisfaction.

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With work I put physical health, but here I am not quite so certain, for some of the happiest people I have known have been invalids, hopeless cripples, blind people, and even (a courage that is to myself incredible) sufferers from continuous physical pain.

Rather than physical health I ought perhaps to say the capacity to deal with the conditions of one's body. Everyone discovers, after being on this earth for a certain number of years, that he is born to certain physical conditions and this includes sexual instincts.

The happy people deal with these conditions as part of the job that they have to carry out in life, not of necessity acquiescing, perhaps indeed fighting all the time, but not, on the other hand, pretending that these conditions are not there.

This fitting oneself into the conditions one is given rather than resenting life because one wants other conditions is, I suppose, one of the first necessities for happiness.

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Then there is the great question of love and friendship. This, many people would put first of all, and I do think that love is the first necessity of life, whether it be love of God, love of a human being, or love of all humanity. The difficult questions of adjustment in marriage are beyond my scope, but as in any case every newspaper discusses them every day of the week my opinion is not needed.

But the most wonderful of all things in life, I believe, is the discovery of another human being with whom one's relationship has a glowing depth, beauty, and joy as the years increase. This inner progressiveness of love between two human beings is a most marvellous thing; it cannot be found by looking for it or by passionately wishing for it. It is a sort of Divine accident.

As to friendship: another of the most unhappy men I know is one who is always losing his friends and cannot understand why. He loses them because he gives them nothing on his side.

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He is a delightful man, intelligent, humorous, and enterprising, but he is never interested in what his friends are doing; they must always write to him first before he sees them, and when he is with them he has no thought of anybody but himself.

This business of friendship is something that needs constant attention, reciprocity and forbearance on both sides, also no humbug. If the elements which gave the friendship its strength disappear, then be frank and let the friendship disappear, too. There is nothing that brings more unhappiness than the attempt to keep alive that which no longer exists in reality.

I would add two more things, both of my own experience. Happiness in mature life comes partly, I think, from unhappiness in childhood. That is a dangerous thing to say, and I suppose, if I had children of my own, I should spoil them to death.

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For myself, I was very miserable until I was aged twenty, and for the last thirty-four years I have been, for the most part, very happy.

My parents were in America when I was young and I hated my early schooldays so bitterly that I remember, when I was in the Russian Army waiting with some carts for the wounded under fire all night, I was, at about three in the morning, so badly frightened that it was all I could do not to run away; but I said to myself, ‘This is not so bad as it was at —,’ and that steadied me.

I have known poverty, have had several serious operations, have lost people I loved dearly, have been bitterly disappointed in my work, saw war with its utmost horrors for two years, have been in three revolutions, have had many bodily complaints, and yet nothing that has happened to me since I was twenty has approached in fear and loneliness and terror the things that happened to me when I was a boy.

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I still sometimes feel that my life since twenty is a kind of dream, and fancy that I will wake up again in that dormitory at —, waiting in an agonized panic to be beaten up and down the dormitory with knotted handkerchiefs. Every day I think that it is a miracle of life that I am having such a good time, not, that is to say, being beaten eternally by knotted handkerchiefs.

And this brings me to my other possession, namely, my capacity, even in my present elderly state, for enjoying what are, I suppose, very small things. Last night, for example, I went to the Holborn Empire, and on the way there I was tasting on my tongue the exquisite pleasure I would shortly obtain from the company of my friends, Mr. Max Miller and Mr. Vic Oliver—and I did obtain it.

I enjoy all kinds of things with what seems to many of my friends extravagant

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pleasure, but then they don't know, most of them, about that dormitory at —. I find that I am most happy whenever I have fitted into the conditions I am given.

I would, for example, dearly love to be a meticulous, beautiful writer like Virginia Woolf, or a super-intelligent, all-knowledge-comprehending thinker like Aldous Huxley.

When, as I constantly do, I realize that I shall always be the careless, voluminous, rather derivative writer that I am, I become, if I permit myself, unhappy. As soon as I realize that I am what I am, I become tranquil again.

Yes, but someone may say, 'Would it not be better for you to be a little unhappy, you might then become a handsome writer?' To which I answer, 'The little bit better writer I might become is of no value to anybody. It is of value to a number of people that I shouldn't be megalomaniac.'

Finally, I end where I began. I believe the

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root of all happiness on this earth to lie in the realization of a spiritual life with a consciousness of something wider than materialism; in the capacity to live in a world that makes you unselfish because you are not over-anxious about your personal place, that makes you tolerant because you realize your own comic fallibilities, that gives you tranquillity without complacency because you believe in something so much larger than yourself.

7

ERIC LINKLATER

**Happiness: a good bank account, a
good cook, and a good digestion.**

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

F

N the humble mythology that peoples this country with such figures as the Little Man, the Post-War Young Man, Colonel Blimp, the Flapper, Mrs. Grundy, and Dora, there is an excellent person called Nosey Parker.

I don't know his exact age, but he is certainly older than the Flapper, and younger, I think, than Mrs. Grundy. In these politically-minded times, when greater beings occupy so much of our unwilling interest, he gets rather less than his due attention; but he goes about his business—which is not his own—as quietly and happily as ever. Like the Royal Artillery, he is ubiquitous.

He can be seen in suburb and village, he belongs to a good many clubs, and he works

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in all large offices and every considerable factory. But he has plenty of time to spare. He rarely misses a fashionable wedding; he waits in Downing Street for a glimpse of Cabinet Ministers and Ambassadors whenever there is a political crisis, and he is generally the first on the scene when a motor-car kills its occupants or a couple of stray pedestrians. He hears all the news, both great and small, and he often shows his good sense by taking more interest in a domestic quarrel next door than in some noisy dispute about the Balkans.

He can tell you what his neighbours had for their last Sunday dinner, and he has a shrewd idea that the Joneses are a week or two behind with the instalments on their new wireless set.

If he happens to be living in a village, he knows all the scandal that villages have the time to elaborate, and even in the busy city, where nearly everyone is a stranger in a huge anonymous horde of strangers, he will scrape acquaintance with someone in a

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crowd and discover his birthplace, business prospects, and the dark places of his conscience. He himself can never long remain unknown, for his expression first betrays him, and then his pertinacious curiosity. He has the look of a happy man.

I do not mean, of course, that he wears the awful grimace, the meaningless and toothy grin, that film-stars, athletic champions, and other notorieties put on in order to be photographed. His expression is rather that of the scientist in his laboratory—the bird-watcher in his hide—a child at play—an old man copying mysterious paragraphs from seven dusty volumes in the reading-room of a public library; but it is livelier than all these put together.

He is more intent than the scientist, more alert than the bird-watcher, more absorbed than the child, more excited than the old man in the library. And he has good reason

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to be, for his quarry is richer. His quarry is human beings, their enchanting variety, and their perpetually adventurous activity.

Let us take off our hats—or perform some equivalent gesture of admiring respect—to Nosey Parker, who has found the secret of happiness. He has found something that will keep him interested for all the days of his life. He will never—unless cruel fate takes him to a desert island—be oppressed by boredom. He will never succumb to indifference, or acquire the dreadful neurosis of the egotist.

He is, indeed, almost as forgetful of self as a saint. If a motor-car stops at the door of his neighbour's house he will rise from the table and let his supper get cold while he peers through the window to see who can be arriving at so late an hour. He has no time to worry about his own appearance, but he knows exactly what all his friends have in their wardrobes.

And he can bear his own disappointments the more philosophically, take his own

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triumphs the more calmly, because he is all agog for the ripening tragedy or the imminent comedy down the street.

Naturally enough, Nosey Parker disapproves of dictatorships, standardization, and efficiency. He disapproves of these things in precisely the same way as a butterfly-hunter would deprecate any suggestion for improving the world of lepidoptera by turning them all into Large Whites.

He realizes that the methods of a factory are not the proper methods for making a nation. He dearly loves an eccentric, and by unremitting study he has discovered a vestigial or incipient eccentricity in everyone he knows. He is, therefore, full of affection for all his neighbours, and though they often resent his loving interest, he is never abashed for very long by their unfriendly manner.

Should someone, indeed, show extravagant annoyance, and go so far as to request Mr.

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Parker to leave his house, then Mr. Parker's interest will at once grow greater, and he will set to work to find the reason for his friend's unusual anger—he may well have committed murder and be hiding the body in the parlour; or perhaps he is entertaining a lady whose appearance would provoke envy and misconception of her character, and so he has temporarily concealed her in the pantry.

It is the height of folly to be rude to Nosey Parker, for he is as persistent as Freud in searching out the hidden motive. Freud himself, of course, is the head of the German branch of the great Parker family.

In the sixteenth century there was a bookseller in Paris, Charron by name, who in the intervals of marketing contemporary best-sellers, begat twenty-five children, of whom a son called Pierre became a famous Parker. He wrote a philosophical work entitled *De la Sagesse* in which occurs the statement: *La vraye science et le vray étude de l'homme c'est l'homme.*

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Two and a half centuries later this observation was purloined by another Parker—who had taken the name of Alexander Pope—and translated thus: ‘The proper study of mankind is man.’ Parker-Pope then proceeded to indicate, for the benefit of non-Parkers, some of the more interesting features of his fellow-men. He had made a close study of one of his neighbours, a very ordinary fellow on the surface, and discovered his character to be:

*Chaos of thought and passion, all confus'd:
Still by himself abused or disabused:
Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl'd;
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!*

There is no doubt that the Parkers are the best and the wisest family on earth. Compare any one of them with a person whose hobby is machinery, for example. The world to-day is full of machines, and crowded with people who spend their work-

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ing hours in tending them, and their leisure time in thinking about them.

And how bored they are! How frowning, sullen, cantankerous, envious of others, dark with spleen and black with the beastliness of carbon and the smirching of oil! And it serves them right.

They have given their hearts to a carburetor, which is no good unless it works properly; but the blessed Mr. Parker, having given his heart to mankind, is delighted with a man who works, because such a creature is a picture of virtue in action—and he is equally delighted with a man who refuses to work, because then he becomes a rebel, which is a most interesting variety of *homo sapiens*. Mr. Parker has it both ways.

Nosey-Parkerizing, then, is a very real sort of happiness. I do not say it is the whole of happiness, but certainly it is a large province in that ill-mapped country. It is interesting to find that an attempt has recently been made to capture the Parker province by a

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new kind of social investigator who calls himself a Mass Observer.

The Mass Observer goes about taking notes of what ordinary people do on ordinary occasions, and pretends that the results of his snooping have scientific value. But the Mass Observer has less wisdom than Mr. Parker, whose investigations are their own reward, and who knows that ordinary people, when closely regarded, are generally quite astonishingly extra-ordinary. The older kind of investigator, who was known as a Social Reformer, was a near relation of Mr. Parker, and shared the family gift of happiness. The happiness of the Social Reformer, however, was generally disguised by a mask of benevolent fury.

8

GERALD BULLETT

To enjoy true happiness, we must travel into a very far country, and even out of ourselves.

SIR THOMAS BROWNE

HAPPINESS? Most of us could write more convincingly of the lack of it. And Robert Louis Stevenson seldom packed more nonsense into a small space than when he spoke of ‘the duty of being happy.’ There is a case, and a strong one, for keeping quiet about one’s own unhappiness so that it may not infect others: but to represent happiness as a positive duty is priggish humbug. A wise man will concern himself less with his own happiness than with that of other people.

And there is more than one way of going about that. The story of Lord Barium is in point here. Lord Barium, in the days when he was plain Mr. Pikestaff, was the father of a large family of small children; and it was his habit to come to the dinner-table armed with a birch rod. ‘Now, children,’ he

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would say, ‘I like to see happy, laughing faces round me at table. And don’t you forget it! If I detect any signs of discontent among you, I shall warm the little seats of your breeches!’



Happiness cannot be commanded. Nor can it be obtained by taking thought. The more one thinks about it and longs for it, the further it recedes. I, like you, have spent too much time wishing for happiness; and all it has brought me is the knowledge that happiness will not come by wishing. It comes, if it comes at all, in moments of self-forgetfulness. ‘To think,’ said Keats, ‘is to be full of sorrow and leaden-eyed despairs.’ But the statement needs qualification. There is such a thing as disinterested thought. The mathematician at work on a problem is not full of sorrow; nor is any man when he is occupied with a job that interests him. Such a man is carried out of himself, into an impersonal country of the mind.

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But to think in terms of oneself and one's own desires, this is indeed a recipe for despair. The desires of man being infinite, it follows that they can never be satisfied. The young child has not yet acquired this bitter wisdom; and the saint, having entered upon a second and beatific childhood, has got beyond it. The child and the saint know what unalloyed happiness is, though they could give no account of it. But for the rest of us it is a lost Eden—or an Eden revisited only in flashes. Scent of hawthorn, sunlight on a bird's wing, these are poignant intimations of something we have lost, or never found.

I do not mean that children are always happy. They certainly are not. I mean only that happiness is a native endowment. A child's grief can fill his universe. But because he has not yet learnt his elders' trick of diluting his sensations with thought, and

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specifically with thoughts of himself and his future, he has a larger capacity for happiness than he is likely to have in later life, when shades of the prison-house shall have closed about him.

He knows happiness before he knows the meaning of the word. Unless there is some particular reason against it, to be alive and to be happy are one and the same thing for him. Whenever the spirit of man is freed from its fetters, there is happiness. It is the only sane criterion of all human values.

*Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine,*

sang Blake. True, but there is this difference between the two. Unhappiness cannot exist in the absence of a cause, whereas happiness always exists in the absence of a cause. That may seem a rash statement, but it will bear examination. Grief (or misery of any

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kind) is caused by this and that, loss of friends, ill-health, lack of money, frustrated desire. But joy has no cause: it is the very ground of our being. We are happy, let us say, when the sun is shining, but not *because* the sun is shining; for, if you come to think of it, there is no logical reason why we should prefer sunshine to dark skies.

The most that can be said is that certain things—sunlight, bodily well-being, love and so on—provide the conditions in which joy is released and has play. But the joy itself is a native endowment, coincident with life itself, perhaps in some sense identical with life itself. Joy is vital, and the frustration of joy is anti-vital.

Moral philosophers in all ages have taught that happiness is from within. So indeed it is. A mind at odds with itself can never be happy, no matter how propitious the out-

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ward circumstances; and it is no use running to the ends of the earth in search of treasure if we carry with us that which will for ever prevent our enjoying it. ‘Heaven lies about us in our infancy,’ says Wordsworth: which is to say that we begin our lives with an almost infinite capacity for being happy. Those in whom the child survives retain this capacity: in any great crisis, whether of joy or of grief, a man is shorn of his years and becomes the child he was.

Yes, happiness is from within; but it is cant to pretend, as some do, that outward circumstances make no difference. For though money doesn’t make people happy, the want of money often makes them unhappy. And there can be little doubt that if the very poor had more money and the very rich had less, the sum-total of human happiness would be considerably augmented. A man out of a job living on a pittance or (worse still) on casual charity, watching his children grow lean and his wife lose hope—such a man, say what you like, is being done

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out of the happiness which is his natural birthright. There are millions in this plight, and the responsibility is ultimately ours, yours and mine. It is not our fault that the thing has happened so, but it will be in some measure our fault if the lamentable state of affairs continues. There is no doubt that if we really wanted to, if we *all* wanted to, we could reorganize human society and establish economic justice in a comparatively short time.

That we fail to do so is due to the fact that dominating all other desires in us is the desire not to be disturbed in our habits of life and thought. If we want social and economic justice in England we can have it. But unfortunately we don't want it. Some of us want it some of the time; but that is not enough. What has this to do with happiness? Everything. For happiness is the ultimate sanction of justice as of everything else. Any other measure of value is a false measure. 'Happiness,' says Dr. Santayana, 'is the only sanction of life. Where happiness fails,

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existence remains a mad and lamentable experiment.'



It is given to few men and women to know continuous happiness. For the most part we have only so much of it as to make us wish for more. And the wishing is worse than futile. Happiness is always round the next corner. We shall be happy to-morrow, and to-morrow never comes. It is better not to think about it. It is better to take Voltaire's advice and cultivate our gardens: our individual gardens and the larger garden we have in common.

Let me end with another and longer quotation from George Santayana, the most urbane of living philosophers. 'I am sometimes blamed,' he writes (in *Soliloquies in England*), 'for not labouring more earnestly to bring down the good of which I prate into the lives of other men. My critics suppose, apparently, that I mean by the good some particular way of life or some type of

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character which is alone virtuous, and which ought to be propagated. Alas, their propagandas! How they have filled this world with hatred, darkness, and blood! How they are still the eternal obstacle, in every home and in every heart, to a simple happiness!'

A simple happiness—that is the ideal this philosopher commends to us. 'The good, as I conceive it,' he adds, 'is happiness, happiness for each man after his own heart, and for each hour according to its inspiration.'

3

JOHN HILTON

**The mind is its own place, and
of itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell
of heaven.**

JOHN MILTON

WHAT is happiness? That is easily answered. All you want is a dictionary. Mine says it is 'the state of pleasurable content of mind.'

True, it hints that by derivation happiness arises from good hap, or, as we now say, good luck, and that consequently the hapless are likely to lack happiness.

True, it further hints that happiness has to do with 'fitting in,' as when we talk about a happy arrangement of something. Those two hints are enough to set one thinking—and even arguing. But to define happiness is child's play. The trouble is to achieve and ensure it—for oneself and for others.

You might say that happiness is what you are sure you would experience if only your tooth would stop aching—or you could get out of your awful job into a better one, or if

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you weren't so deeply in debt. There's a good deal in that. Happiness is what we should enjoy if only . . .

Alas, when the ache stops, or the wished-for job is got, or the debt is cleared at a stroke, the mind, relieved of that special worry, becomes aware of new and often more painful ones.

That is why in our weaker moods we hang on to our illnesses and grievances. Something tells us we should be lost or tormented without them. It was Dave Harum, I think, who held that 'a sart'n amount of fleas is good for a dog, they keeps him from worryin' about bein' a dog.'

None the less, freedom from aches and pains and worrying hardships is a good foundation for happiness. I put it no higher than that—a good foundation. The fact that so many build unhappy lives on carefree

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foundations is no reason, it seems to me, for saying that health and fortune and congenial work don't matter.

They do matter; and if we want widespread happiness we must attend to such things. But how shall we go on to ensure, as we must if our aim is happiness, that the nature which has been freed from real cares doesn't straightway begin to manufacture for itself a waking nightmare of friction and discontent and fear?

Alas, we know very little about that mysterious alchemy by which we distil from outward circumstance our inner gladness or sadness. Is it just that some are born with a happy disposition and some with a melancholic one, and there's no doing much about it?

Not altogether, I think. Indeed, it may be very little a matter of birth. It may be much more a matter of rearing and training.

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Moreover, we all know some whose dispositions have been changed by some change of health or circumstance. Is the apparent serenity of some lives just dullness? Maybe; but it would be folly to assume that the serene are always the bovine and the thick-skinned.

Is it that given a nature of certain quality happiness and unhappiness must alternate—that happiness is to be enjoyed only by contrast? There is something in that. But in some lives there seems to be almost unbroken joy and in others almost unbroken gloom.



Yes, it is an alchemy, and we are each of us our own alchemists. We all want to turn as far as may be the baser metal of our experiences into the gold of happiness; and we go through life seeking a formula,

‘Count your blessings.’ Yes, but when we are in the dumps they seem somehow to add up to zero. ‘Lead a righteous, godly, and

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sober life.' Yes: but many such have died of broken hearts.

'Find yourself and be yourself.' Yes, but the search can be gruelling and the end not sure. Many have lost themselves.

'Believe this, recite that, and practise the other.' Yes, but so many who declare their success in these ways have resorted to them as medicines for deep wretchedness and we know how precarious is their hold on the new-found peace.

And, latest prescription, that of the lively James Thurber, 'For goodness' sake leave your mind alone.' There's perhaps a good deal in that. Never mind your mind. Get on with your living. Don't pursue happiness; it doesn't come by seeking. If you must pursue something, pursue fullness of life and let happiness or unhappiness come as and when and how it may. If unhappiness comes, stick it out. If happiness comes, be thankful.



WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

A young man writes to me to say that three things are needful to him if he is to have the sense of living life to the full: to find his talent, to find his job, and to find his mate. Not all will agree with the order: but I think all will agree that he has named three essentials.

But he hasn't named the fourth. He's left out friends. It seems to me that of all the ingredients in the cup of our happiness the one that outranks all the rest is the way we get on with those about us. That can make, whatever our lot in other respects, the difference between a life of hell on earth and of heaven on earth.

Whether we live in a hovel or in a palace, whether our lot is to sweep the streets or rule the city, whether we ride on a Stop-Me-and-Buy-One or in a Rolls-Royce, what determines our 'pleasurable content of mind' is, more than anything else, how we get on with those about us.

That is the fine art of living happily by getting on well together. Every child knows

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that to be the final triumph of the well-lived life. ‘They all lived happy ever after.’ All, mind you. Not just one or two here and there. And they all lived happy ever after, not as lonely separate specimens, but all together in one happy company.

There are those who find, or affect to find, deep truths in old sayings and in old songs. I sometimes wonder if there may not be as much profound truth discoverable in the words of the songs of yesterday and to-day. I am thinking of:

*I want to be happy
But I can't be happy
Till I've made you happy
Too.*

Is that just rag-time jingle or is it truth? I rather think it's one of the truths. If it is, then indeed we have got somewhere. Per-

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haps happiness most surely comes as a consequence of making others happy.

But (there is always a ‘but’) . . . does that square really and truly with the facts of life, with people as we know them? What about those of whom we say: ‘She never opens her lips but she spits out an acid drop?’ (Yes, a ‘she,’ I fear, even more than a ‘he.’)

Or what of the unloader? He fumes and curses and groans (this is more often a ‘he’) until he finds someone, some company, thoroughly content and happy. He unloads his pack of mischief and misery. They’re all at sixes and sevens. He walks off, happy. The only happiness he ever seems to know.

What of those who are never happy unless they are causing pain and distress to someone; those whose lustful rapture is in brutal repressions and punishments? What of those who revel in throwing their weight about, in putting on the screw?

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Diseased, I think, all these. Or, perhaps better, 'spoilt.' I do not think it is in normal human nature to find pleasure in the sufferings of others. We all have streaks of it in us, of course. We are all in part 'spoilt.' We had the makings of better creatures than we are.

Our breeding is, I think, mostly better than our rearing. Perhaps as we go on we shall learn how so to rear our young, how so to bring them up and bring them out as to help the natural sense of happiness in others' happiness unspoilt by bad treatment.

There is no recipe for happiness that I know of except to live your life to the full in an endeavour to obtain not your own happiness but the happiness of others.

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HAVELOCK ELLIS

There is that in me—I do not know
what it is—but I know it is in
me. . . .

I do not know it—it is without name
—it is a word unsaid;

It is not in any dictionary, utterance,
symbol.

Something it swings on more than
the earth I swing on.

To it the creation is the friend whose
embracing awakes me. . . .

It is not chaos or death—it is form,
union, plan—it is eternal life—it
is Happiness.

WALT WHITMAN



THREE is always an interest in investigating strange monsters. Few monsters so mysterious and so shapeless are so often brought before us as 'Happiness.' Needless to say, the people who thus present it to us never themselves know what it is like. If there are any who do, they are people who never mention its name.

It might seem helpful to know what the creature was like at its birth. We turn to the dictionaries. Here we find that 'Happiness' began by being 'hap' or 'chance' or 'luck.' So that, in terms of to-day the 'happy' man is he who wins a prize in a lottery or chances to put his money on the right horse.

But a 'happiness' which thus remains

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remote from a man's will or his deserts does not altogether appeal as satisfactory to the modern mind. Our demands are larger.

A serious young American who once anxiously consulted me on the nature of 'Happiness' informed me that, after investigating the subject, he found there were fifty-seven different ways of living to choose from when one is called upon to select the path of 'Happiness.'

My correspondent's own enumeration of the elements of 'Happiness' was: (1) Sustenance, (2) Health, (3) Sex and Marriage, (4) Social Harmony, (5) Cultural and Recreational resources.

Well and good! I do not see anyone raising objections. But is it realized what the satisfaction of these five demands involves?

Almost certainly, for most of us, they involve—some chiefly at one end of life and some at the other—perpetual struggle and

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effort, much self-discipline and usually also discipline at the hands of others, doubt and uncertainty with the certainty of much disappointment, constant anxiety, perhaps remorse, and always the vision or the memory or the actual presence of pain.

When my friends cheerfully write to wish me ‘continued happiness’ (as they chance to be doing to-day, since it is my birthday), is it these strains and stresses that they would still inflict on me? Before calling it ‘happiness’ they might recall the saying of Napoleon: ‘Man can invent everything except the art of being happy.’

Most of those, however, who attempt to define ‘Happiness,’ are wisely content with more summary definitions than my American correspondent. ‘The name we give to the unhappiness of others’ is how happiness appears to one rather cynical pessimist.

George Eliot, approaching from another

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aspect, defined it as ‘a well-fleshed indifference to sorrow outside it.’ That indeed is an aspect we cannot fail to be brought up against.

Lucretius referred to the satisfaction experienced by the man who stands safely on shore and views those who are drowning in the sea. To-day, when books pour from the press to describe how thousands in China and in Spain are dying in torture or else are deprived of all that makes life worth living, the man who from the shores of a cautiously democratic island gloats over his own happiness, scarcely seems a more estimable object.

It would seem, indeed, that happiness comes to be regarded as the mark of creatures on a very low and dull level. It is an ideal which is best realized in the Zoo. There are no anxieties and few possibilities of danger; food, and shelter are provided without struggle or effort. Happiness may be the perquisite of the pigsty.

It seems precisely the absence of struggle

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and effort that is fatal. Pain as well as pleasure is essential to all fine living; it is even essential for all living creatures who live according to nature. And even birds, who appear so joyous, are perpetually on the watch against pain. The highest points of living are impossible without it. No joy without agony.

The distinguished French writer Colette, who has had a wide experience of what is called 'life,' when not long ago questioned by a journalist, said: 'If I had to begin life again I would keep everything.' 'But happiness?' he asked. 'Happiness?' she replied, 'I don't know what it is. Happiness without unhappiness is not complete.'

That undoubtedly is the feeling which, whether or not consciously, underlies the experience of those who have lived deeply. Happiness, they find, at the best remains rare and elusive.

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Goethe, after a long life, full not only of work but of much personal joy and personal sorrow, said that he had altogether enjoyed a fortnight of happiness.

When I look back on my own life I recall moments of what seems to have been pure happiness. But I am sure that if at such moments I had paused to seize and analyse my happiness it would have slipped through my fingers.

The conclusion of the matter is that we still cling to the conception of happiness. But the moments when we come nearest to its achievement are those when we have no thought of its definition.





